

BAKER

We have heard many great things about John the Baptist this week. He is the greater than all the prophets of old, he lived an austere life eating bugs, and he was the voice crying out in the wilderness. But did you know that he is known for something even greater: leather belts.

In the book of Sirach we hear a brief synopsis of the story of Elijah. Elijah was a prophet during the reign of Israel's kings after the reign of Solomon. He shut up the heavens by his word, raised a corpse from the dead, and he was taken up into heaven by a chariot with horses of fire. However, the key passage is near the end of the reading; it says this:

At the appointed time, it is written, you are destined
to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury,
to turn the hearts of parents to their children,
and to restore the tribes of Jacob.

The Jewish traditions believed that Elijah would come and prepare the hearts of the people for the coming of not just the Messiah, an earthly king, but for the king of heaven himself, for the Lord God to come.

Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes
(Mal 4:5)

So what does Elijah have to do with John the Baptist and leather belts?

Listen carefully to how 2 Kings 1:8 describes Elijah: the servants of the king described him as "A HAIRY man, with a LEATHER BELT around his WAIST...It is ELIJAH the Tishbite."

Fast forward several hundred years and JOHN THE BAPTIST comes on the scene by the Jordan wearing "a garment of camel's HAIR and a LEATHER GIRDLE around his WAIST" (Mt 3:4).

The leather belt and the garment of camel's hair were signs of a prophet, and these were the signs that John the Baptist was using to allude to his role as the New Elijah.

I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him

Yet the question remains for us is, do we recognize the 'Elijah' in our lives announcing the way of the Lord? We can be caught up in our modern era believing that God is far

away. He gives us sacraments and created the world, but really he has nothing to do with my day to day life.

A good way to counteract this cultural influence is by doing the Examen Prayer. The Examen prayer is like the examination of conscience but different. It's focus is not directly on sin but rather on how I have responded to God's love throughout the day. Throughout the day there are many voices crying out in the wilderness of our lives, many John the Baptists knocking on the door of our heart to get us to see how God is present with us right in the midst of our daily lives.

When St. Ignatius would pray during the day, he would take off his hat and kneel on the ground and his companions would remark how his eyes would just be filled with tears in the presence of God. I experience this when I think about my future ordination. You just experience pure love flowing from heaven into your heart—signs of his affection.

Or God may be putting people in your life to point you to the next plan of action he wants for you. For example, I've been thinking of the need for a youth group for younger kids for a while, and it seems as if God is putting people who desire the same thing, people with a certain skillset and passion for this ministry in my life.

With the help of a spiritual advisor, we can help discern these different inspirations, these different John the Baptists prompting us to turn our hearts to the Father.

An easy way to do the prayer is to remember the word BAKER

B stands for blessings (reviewing blessings/consolations of the day)

A stands for ask (ask for the Holy Spirit to recognize our sins)

K stands for kill (it was our sins that crucified Jesus so look for sin in our life/desolations)

E stands for embrace (allow Jesus to embrace us)

R stands for resolution (make some concrete changes in your life)

By incorporating this into our life, we will not miss the New Elijah announcing the coming of the Lord in our hearts and strive to respond to his call in every moment of our life.